

**Modern History Sourcebook:
Andrew F. Crosse:
The Transylvanian Germans, 1878**

From: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1878trnslnagermans.html>

I remained several days at Hermannstadt, principally for the sake of resting my horses, which unfortunately had been rubbed by the saddle-bags on my ride from Petroseny. I spent the time agreeably enough, exploring the neighbourhood and making chance acquaintances. I bought here Bishop Teusch's *History of Transylvanian Saxons*, a hand-book in two volumes. It interested me very much, especially reading it in the country itself where so many stirring scenes had been enacted. Wishing to see some of the neighboring villages, I set off one fine day on a walking expedition. I chose Sunday, because on that day one can see to best advantage the costume of the peasants. Hammersdorf is a pretty enough village, "fair with orchard lawns," but not so charming as Heltau, which, standing on high ground, commands an extensive view of the whole plain, with the old "Red Town" in the foreground of the picture. The church in this village is a very fine specimen of the fortified churches, which are a unique feature of the Transylvanian borderland. The origin of this form of architecture is very obvious; it was necessary to have a defense against the incursions of the Tartars and Turks, who for centuries troubled the peace of this fair land. In every village of the Saxons in the south and east of Transylvania the church is also a fortified place, fitted to maintain a siege if necessary. The construction of these buildings varies according to circumstances: the general character is that the sacred edifice is surrounded, or forms part of a strong wall with its watchtowers; not infrequently a second and even a third wall surround the place. In every case a considerable space of ground is enclosed around the church, sufficient to provide accommodation for the villagers; in fact every family with a house outside had a corresponding hut within the fortified walls. Here, too, was a granary, and some of the larger places had also their school-tower attached to the church. It happened not infrequently that the villagers were obliged to remain for some weeks in their sanctuary.

Heltau is an industrious little place. Here is manufactured the peculiar white frieze so much worn by the Wallachians. Nearly every house has its loom, but I was told the trade is less flourishing than formerly. The woolen-cloth manufacturers of Transylvania have suffered very much from the introduction of foreign goods; but, on the other hand, if they would bestir themselves they might enormously increase their exports. Heltau is a market-place, and reserves many old privileges very jealously. Its inhabitants were often in dispute with the burghers of Hermannstadt, and on one occasion they had the audacity, in rebuilding their church-tower, to place four turrets upon it. Their neighbours regarded this with great indignation, for are not four turrets the sign and symbol of civic authority? The burghers of Hermannstadt hereupon obliged the men of Heltau to sign a bond, saying that "they were but humble villagers", and promising to treat their haughty neighbours with all due "honor, fear, and friendship."

From Heltau I went on to Michaelsburg, an extremely curious place. In the centre of a lovely valley rises a conical rock of gneiss, protruding to the height of 200 feet or more. This is crowned by the ruins of a Romanesque church. There are, I believe, only two other specimens of this kind of architecture in the country. The time of the building of Michaelsburg is stated to be between 1173 and 1223. Before the use of artillery this fortified church on the rock must have really been impregnable. Inside the walls I found a quantity of large round stones---the shot and shell of those days; these stones were capable of making considerable havoc amongst a besieging party I should say. The custom was in the old time that no young man should be allowed to take unto himself a wife till he had carried one such stone from the bed of the river where they are found, to the summit of the rock within the church walls. As these stones weigh between two and three hundred-weight, and the ascent is very steep, it was a test of strength. The villagers were anxious to prevent the weaklings from marrying lest they should spoil the hardy race.

Source:

From: Andrew F. Crosse, *Round About the Carpathians*, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1878), pp. 178-181, reprinted in Alfred J. Bannan & Achilles Edelenyi, eds., *Documentary History of Eastern Europe*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), pp. 156-158.

Scanned by Jerome S. Arkenberg, Cal. State Fullerton. The text has been modernized by Prof. Arkenberg.

This text is part of the [Internet Modern History Sourcebook](#). The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts for introductory level classes in modern European and World history.

Unless otherwise indicated the specific electronic form of the document is copyright. Permission is granted for electronic copying, distribution in print form for educational purposes and personal use. If you do reduplicate the document, indicate the source. No permission is granted for commercial use of the Sourcebook.

© Paul Halsall, August 1998
halsall@murray.fordham.edu